

Sabin

Rural and Public Health Program: January 2008



My time in India seems to be coming to an end, and looking back on it, I've had one of the most fantastic experiences of my life so far, one which I know will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Where to start...

Coming into Mumbai late on the Friday night I found the orientation period during the Saturday and Sunday to be extremely helpful, and it allowed me to immerse myself with my new surrounding and adapt to the new culture of Indian life. We were well looked after by Sharad Kale who made the transition into Pen a very smooth and easy process.

Beginning work at CFI on the Monday we were greeted with nothing but smiles. For the first three weeks I worked alongside Dr Vayshali Patil doing community checkups with the mobile health unit. From my first visit to the village of Kumbhiva Pakuari, I knew that the mobile health unit was exactly what I had envisioned myself doing in India and I loved every second of it. As there were three of us doing the checkups alongside Dr Vayshali, we would alternate at every village; one person was doing the checkups, one person taking the heights and weights of the children, and one person distributing the medicines. Although we were slow at first to learn all the names of the different medicines and their various uses, Dr Vayshali was more than happy to explain and answer any other questions that we had, and within a few days we were more than fluent in all of their applications. One of the main reasons that I truly loved the Mobile health unit was that it not only gave you the opportunity to put one's medical knowledge into practice and help other individuals, but it also allowed you to experience true Indian culture, as we were always invited into the villagers home's, and were given more Chaha than I knew what to do with!

Through the 3 weeks of working with the mobile health unit I found that the malnutrition was one of the main problems faced by the children as well as most of the general population of the rural villages. I realized that this was obviously something to expect within rural villages due to the limited varieties of foods incorporated into the people's diets.

One suggestion I wanted to put forward would be to maybe incorporate foods such as:

- Bananas, which are rich in potassium and can be extremely useful in treating things such as anemia
- Spinach: rich in Calcium which was also a major problem in some of the children as well as in the elderly members of the community.

The social workers that came with to the villages were beyond friendly, and were more than happy to answer any of the questions that we had concerning the villages. Before commencing the checkups, we

would also be given a tour of the villages on some occasions, something which I found to be truly amazing as it allowed me to experience what life was like within an Indian village.

One of the main highlights of my visits to the villages was in Sunkar. Finishing the check up we began to pack away all of the medicines during which time our driver was teaching us phrases in Marathi. As soon as the children heard us speaking Marathi they rushed in to come see what was happening, and by the time I looked up to see what was going on I was surrounded by most of the village, all intently listening to what was going on and all wearing the biggest smiles that I have ever seen. We then asked the children if they knew any English songs and soon we were all singing along to 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' every one of us laughing.

I really enjoyed being able to work during the week and travel during the weekends as I found it allowed me to experience the best of both worlds. Visiting places such as Alibaag, Mumbai and Goa I could not believe the beauty of the country. I also definitely enjoyed being able to experience all forms of public transport, and now consider myself to be a professional when it comes to catching buses and trains in India :)

Also working at the CFI hospital as well the civil hospital I was able to experience how the medical system worked in India. At the CFI hospital I was able to watch surgeries performed by Dr Gawali, mainly those relating to 'family planning.' I found this to be extremely interesting and was especially intrigued about the fact that all of the surgeries performed were done under a local anesthesia.

Working at the civil hospital allowed me to experience the clinical aspect of the medical system in India as I was able to observe checkups conducted by the doctors who were more than happy to answer any questions that I had.

I was also able to experience two medical checkups, one dealing with HIV/Aids and one which dealt with performing gynecological checkups on pregnant women. These were amazing experiences and allowed me to observe the various services provided to the communities. I also learned a lot through these outings including the overwhelming problems faced by the Indian population relating to HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases.

From our initial series of phone calls and SMS's as I arrived at Mumbai airport, both you and Aparna have been absolutely amazing and I really appreciate and wanted to thank you for all the work you have done for us.

Overall I have found this program to have been life changing and an incredible experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. I have no doubt that I will return to India in the near future and enjoy many of the wonders that it has to offer...

Danyawad and thank you so much for all of your help and for allowing me to experience such a wonderful program!

All the best,

Sabin
Rural and Public Health Rotation